

*by Norman Macleod*

## NOTES ON REGIONALISM

AS I sit here in the front room of our small adobe house (once a part of a big hacienda but, due to the Spanish custom of willing separate rooms to offspring, has been broken off from what was at one time a building covering two blocks with a large patio in the center), listening to some modern caballeros singing a Spanish song in a Mexican bootlegger's joint next door, I realize once again what I felt and knew the first time I walked across the outer fringes of the Southwest ten years ago: the poetry, drama, lore and legend still bearing the mark of regional authenticity in a land which has integrated and synthetized (as far as this ever occurs) the cultural traditions of at least three civilizations. This land is young and old at the same time. Only the occasional outposts of eastern industrialism have struck a false note (in this country as yet unready to be oriented to a modern industrialism), and they are far and few between. Several years ago artists and writers discovered in this region what was not so obviously apparent at that time in other sections of the country. Indeed in many parts, the traces of the region, its tradition and color, had been obliterated. All that remained was the chaos: and the result: the poets of sincere frustration, baffled and confused, heartsick and weary with the modern panorama gutted with industrialism, webbed with capitalistic lines of communication. Anarchy on a grand scale except for the integration of money. If there is a solution, many of them know it not: hence, confusion and despair. Hence: the expatriates and the revolutionists. Hence: the ivory castles and the ones who look towards Russia.

But in the Southwest the problem has not been so exigent. The modern consciousness is aware and the international influence is to be discerned, but yet there is still room for spiritual quietude and calm: Rilke, who said that the three essential conditions for poetry were "space around one's feelings", a "contemplation that desires naught" (debateable), and "a well wrought death" (his mysticism: variety objectionable, but presumably poetic and per-

haps justifiable if defined), would have found nothing to object to there. That is why the region looms so large in the creative consciousness. There is order. There is meaning. There is a wealth of detail and possibilities of culture.

I have an intense admiration for the Navajo: who has stamped with his impress the country even more, perhaps, than has the Pueblo. His poetry is of a higher order than that of any American Indian. He is self-sustained and sure. His rhythms are the country's rhythms. His philosophy that of rock and sand, sunset and lightning, color and sound, rain and drouth, and inner well-being. No matter that it is said that he plagiarized the Pueblo. In so doing, perhaps, he did not fully understand the mythology from which he partook to nourish his own spiritual life, but he selected the essentials and sublimated the rest into a higher order of experience, and finally he made it his own.

What would Oliver La Farge's *Laughing Boy* have been without Washington Matthews? The source of his information relating to Navajo ritual, its poetry:

Now, Slayer of Enemy Gods, alone I see him coming,  
Down from the skies, alone I see him coming.  
His voice sounds all about,  
His voice sounds, divine.  
Lé-e!

Now, child of the waters, alone I see him coming . . .

And:

With a place of hunger in me I wander,  
Food will not fill it,  
Aya-ah, beautiful.  
With an empty place in me I wander,  
Nothing will fill it,  
Aya-ah, beautiful.  
With a place of sorrow within me I wander,  
Time will not end it,  
Aya-ah, beautiful.  
With a place of loneliness in me I wander,  
No one will fill it,  
Aya-ah, beautiful.  
Forever alone, forever in sorrow I wander,  
Forever empty, forever hungry I wander,  
With the sorrow of great beauty I wander,  
With the emptiness of great beauty I wander,  
Never alone, never weeping, never empty,

Now on the old age trail, now on the path of beauty I wander,  
Ahalani, beautiful.

In Germany, in Russia of a novelist who has failed they often say, "He is not a poet." *Laughing Boy* was as good as it was because it was poetry, and that poetry was of the Navajo. He has attained what many weary mortals never have: spiritual adjustment to his environment. His rhythms are more important than his thought: they are not only racial rhythms but regional ones. they effect (whether the Navajo had existed or not): the authentic expression of the country. The pueblo rhythms also but to a lesser degree, being less imaginative, less creative, less of what the country is and holds. This element is vital in the expression of any creative artist. The rhythm is necessary whether it be of machines, industrialism, hunger, poverty, subways, metropolises or of the desert and its timelessness, its repetition, its song in the wind weathering the scrubcedars and mesas, buttes and cañons, a long sweep in a short way as the years. Of course, it is felt and reinterpreted according to the individual. The cowboy has sung it as the Indian but with different material and different pulse. The Mexicans were little affected by it in song, but it affected their lives. The Americans are crass but its artists of necessity are not. Many of our literary generation have felt this thing. Some passing through have remembered and written while others have returned to know it better: its ungarnished authenticity: the value of its expression: and the conclusion of material: why Georges Linze (of all modern poets) writes as it is *here*. He has synthesized. Here it is already integrated without having been written: its major expression. D. H. Lawrence preferred Taos to the rest of the world and wrote in the *Laughing Horse* speaking of its corn liquor and moonlight and the silent rhythm of its earth. When he died he was hoping to return. He never did but his memory lingers. In his *Men in New Mexico* he has articulated this pulse with that of a nightmare: sleep and "they can't get up, they are under the blanket." But the rhythm persists in sleep even as with the country. A dark membrane (Lawrence) or a sheet of daylight (Navajo): it is one and the same thing with a different expression. Many have worked as in creative photography: but is is not creative nor is it photography. Of them it is not necessary to speak.

No writer has succeeded entirely, but many have worked well: Alice Corbin, William Haskell Simpson, Witter Bynner, Eda Lou Walton and Mary Austin (in transcription), Willard Johnson, James Rorty and Ivor Winters.

This letter practically starts and ends with a preface. The regions are being integrated in creative work even as the Southwest is being. They have their own journals for this purpose: it might be interesting to list some of them (so far as I know them):

(State or national boundaries are not necessarily lines of demarcation). To begin at home the Southwest has the *Southwest Review* (Dallas), *Folk-Say* (Norman), the *Laughing Horse* (Taos). California has *Hesperian* (San Francisco). The Northwest, *The Frontier* (Missoula). The Middle West has *Midland* (Chicago), *Prairie Schooner* (Lincoln), and a few lesser journals. The east has few of importance. The South, *The Sewanee Review* and others (natives may amplify). Peru has *Amauta*. Czechoslovakia, *Kvart*. Belgium, *Anthologie*. It is entirely international as phenomena. The only journals that remain are ones that cut across these boundaries and integrate. (Of course, the staid ones are stayed and outside recognition: authority, if I needed any, being Pound and any other man of intelligence.)

First of all, then (not being an exponent of regionalism as an end in itself): the development out of one's own soil and regional tradition; then the selection of the universals (a difficult task but one which will be simplified as time goes on)—I may not live to see it—and the inter-integration of the regions, the synthesis of the world. Of course, this is skipping many points (which is safer) and allows me easily to forget about economics.

So allow me to let it go at that.